



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Office of Marine Safety

Date: January 4, 2003

Place: via cell phone (Brownsteins driving their RV) cell phone on hands free speaker in RV.

Person Interviewed: Stewart, Cindy and Stephanie Brownstein and Jennifer Molay

Interview Conducted By: Jim Walsh
Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

INTRODUCTION

The Brownstein group was interviewed in conjunction with the investigation into the sinking of the *Panther* (DCA03MM018). The text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from my handwritten notes of the conversation and is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and recollection.

INTERVIEW

The Brownstein Group (BG) purchased their ticket with a credit card – one receipt was issued containing passage for all four people in the party. Upon boarding the boat the captain took their ticket. Once all guest were aboard the captain conducted a head count and jokingly observed that he always likes to return with the same amount he leaves with.

As the boat left the dock the captain told the pax where the life jackets were stored, gave brief history of his background. The BG did note that the bilge pumps were working prior to boarding the boat, and did not note any unusual vibration or noise.

The boat proceeded at a slow speed for a while then the captain spotted a dolphin and he increased speed. The captain suggested that people who wanted to get a better look at the dolphins should move to the rear of the boat.

While moving at the increased speed, the captain made at least two high speed turns. The group thought it was unusual because of the amount of water that came aboard in the back of the boat. With each turn more water would come in first through the bottom then over the top. First their sneakers got wet and then they had to move their camera bag to the inside of the seat due to the amount of water coming in.

Another tour boat – the *Manatee II* - was also out in the channel as the *Panther I* made the turns attracting the dolphins.

The captain asked pax if they could see a discharge from the pumps as his view was obstructed. The pax answered that a stream of water was coming out of the boat.

The captain kept trying to talk on the PA and all they heard were clicks and crackling noise. The *Manatee II* had already left the scene. We were stopped for about six minutes when the captain saw another boat, which turned out to be an in bound crab boat. At some point during this time the captain asked people to move back forward away from the back end of the boat.

The captain waved the crab boat over and within seconds of the crab boat being alongside the panther sunk in about three to five seconds. Once the boat sunk they all rushed for the crab boat. They stated that they were all good swimmers so it wasn't a big deal. The water was cool.

Two other tour boats showed up about twenty minutes later. They got in the Skimmer and were transported back to the NPS dock area. There were no blankets on the tour boats, no safety brief... Names and addresses were taken once the Park personnel could take them but they noted that no one group was in charge of the head count or of collecting information.

The group was curious why the captain had not told them to take out their lifejackets at the first sign of trouble, as there was plenty of time.

END OF INTERVIEW

Jim Walsh